

**Principles, Criteria and Standards for  
Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for  
Registration of Registered Social Workers**

**15 October 2014**

**(with effect from 1 September 2015)**

**(Appendices C & D amended on 31 July 2018)**

**SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION BOARD**

# **SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION BOARD**

## **Principles, Criteria, and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration of Registered Social Workers**

### **Foreword**

The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board) is empowered by the Social Workers Registration Ordinance, Chapter 505, to assess qualifications in social work to ascertain whether to recognize a qualification for registration, thereby qualifying its holder for registration as a registered social worker (RSW). In this regard, the Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration (the Committee) is tasked, amongst other duties, to:

- (A) set, review and recommend to the Board the principles, criteria and standards for recognizing qualifications in social work for registration purpose; and
- (B) establish lists of local and overseas qualifications in social work recognized by the Board for registration purpose.

The Board strives for ensuring the professional quality of RSWs by setting basic qualification standards for registration. It is also the philosophy and fundamental value of the Board to ensure that tertiary institutions (TIs) will train competent social workers to serve Hong Kong society. To achieve these purposes, the Committee and other related entities appointed by the Board will, based on the requirements set out in the following sections of this document, carry out thorough assessments of programmes leading to recognized social work qualifications for registration. To facilitate the graduates of their social work programmes that they offer locally or elsewhere to be registered as RSWs, local TIs should file applications with the Board for recognition of the qualifications led by those programmes. Social work programmes designed for facilitating social workers' professional enhancement, however, are not covered in this context.

To keep abreast of the latest development of social work training and to achieve its functions with foresight, the Board may review and update the contents of this document from time to time. The Board also reserves the right to visit individual TIs for the purposes mentioned above should it envisage such a need.

## **1 Guiding Principles for Professional Recognition**

The Board's criteria and standards for professional recognition are set having regard to the following principles:

- (A) The rights, duties and academic autonomy of the TIs shall be respected.
- (B) The uniqueness and variations of various local social work training programmes will be accommodated. A standard of basic requirements and criteria is set for qualification recognition and quality assurance.
- (C) The Board will adopt a collaborative approach that emphasizes communication and mutual respect between the Board and TIs.
- (D) Professional standard and comparability with international standards will be enhanced. The Board will, in consultation with the TIs, make concerted efforts to continuously upgrade professional education.

## **2 Criteria and Standards for Qualification Recognition**

2.1 The criteria and standards laid down in the following sections are only meant to be the baseline of programmes leading to recognized social work qualifications that would qualify their holders to be registered with the Board as RSWs. TIs are encouraged to develop their programmes to standards higher than the requirements.

### **2.2 Curriculum Content and Structure**

2.2.1 Programmes that lead to social work qualifications recognized by the Board for registration should facilitate their graduates to achieve a minimum standard of competency in practising social work in a local context and to be capable of meeting changing needs of society and service users. To help attain these objectives, the Board sets out the following requirements for the curriculum content and structure of those social work programmes:

(A) Social Work Core

(a) Social Work Practice

Required Subject Areas <sup>1</sup>	Basic Components/Contents
Social work theories and practice	(i) Theory and practice with individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities (ii) Integrative social work practice (iii) Social work skills training (iv) Practice-related electives
Values and ethics	(i) Personal and professional development (ii) Social work values and ethics in contexts (iii) Code of ethics

(b) Others

Required Subject Areas	Basic Components/Contents
Social welfare systems and social policies	(i) Perspectives and concepts of social welfare (ii) Social welfare systems, such as those in Hong Kong, Mainland China and international communities (iii) Social policies and social services (iv) Social workers registration in Hong Kong
Human behaviour and social environment	(i) Life span development (ii) Human behaviour and diversity (iii) Human behaviour and social environment
Social administration and management	(i) Social planning and development (ii) Agency management – models and processes (iii) Programme planning, management, and evaluation

---

<sup>1</sup> While the required subject areas and the basic components/contents should be covered in the programme, they are not necessarily independent courses.

(B) Non-social Work Core

Required Subject Areas	Basic Components/Contents
Social sciences and liberal arts knowledge	(i) Sociology (ii) Psychology (iii) Other components/contents such as Economics, Political Science, Philosophy, History, etc.
Research and social enquiries <sup>(a)</sup>	(i) Basic knowledge and skills of research and social enquiries (ii) Utilization and application of research
Legal knowledge	Basic legal knowledge and perspectives related to social work practice
Communication skills	(i) Self-understanding and interpersonal communication (ii) Use of language for social work practice <sup>(b)</sup>

Notes

- (a) Research and social enquiries are required for a degree programme but optional for a sub-degree programme<sup>2</sup>.
- (b) TIs should ensure that the graduates of the programmes leading to social work qualifications recognized for registration have adequate language competency for local practice.

(C) Field Practicum

(a) Fieldwork Hours

(i) Sub-degree Programme

The practicum of a sub-degree programme should consist of a minimum of 700 hours' direct fieldwork placement plus 100 hours' placement preparation or related activities such as training workshop, attachments, etc.

(ii) Degree Programme<sup>3</sup>

The practicum of a degree programme should consist of a minimum of 800 hours' direct fieldwork placement plus

---

<sup>2</sup> including diploma, higher diploma or associate degree programmes

<sup>3</sup> Conversion degree programmes are not included in this context.

100 hours' placement preparation or related activities such as training workshop, attachments, etc.

(b) Supervision Time

- (i) at least 1.5 hours for a placement period of 4-6 sessions per week;
- (ii) at least two hours for a placement period of seven sessions or more per week; and
- (iii) at least 1.5 hours every fortnight for a placement period of three sessions or less per week.

(c) Mode of Supervision

- (i) At least 50 percent of the total required supervision time should be individual supervision.
- (ii) At least 50 percent of the total required supervision time should be allocated to on-site supervision.

(d) Location of Placement

Preferably at least one placement takes place in the local territory.

(e) On-the-job Placement

A social work programme may allow its students an option for on-the-job placements by using the work settings in their employing agencies as the required placements. These on-the-job placements should fulfil all of the following conditions:

- (i) There is no more than one on-the-job placement throughout the studying period of each programme.
- (ii) Social work duties in the placement are distinctly designated and the period of time of such duties meets the requirement of fieldwork hours.
- (iii) The designated social work duties are commensurate with the level of the programme training.

- (iv) The requirement of supervision time is met.
- (v) A qualified fieldwork supervisor, who is external to the placement service unit or the placement agency, is assigned by the TI for the placement.
- (vi) In any circumstances, the administrative supervisor of the student having an on-the-job placement in his/her employing agency should not assume the role and responsibilities as the fieldwork supervisor of that student.

2.2.2 A course or an assessment should not be counted more than once towards different requirements.

### 2.3 Qualifications of Persons Providing Professional Training

2.3.1 In regard to recognition of social work qualifications for registration, the key requirements for qualifications of teaching staff providing professional training are mainly related to social work practice courses and field practicum.

#### 2.3.2 Academic Staff<sup>4</sup>

##### (A) Sub-degree Programme

- (a) Among the full-time academic staff of a programme concerned, 80 percent or three, whichever is the greater, should each hold a post-graduate degree in social work or a related discipline.
- (b) Those who teach social work practice subjects<sup>5</sup> should be an RSW or equivalent<sup>6</sup> and possess not less than five years' post-degree<sup>7</sup> experience in social work practice<sup>8</sup>.
- (c) The ratio of full-time academic staff and part-time academic staff, or equivalent, to student<sup>9</sup> of the programme should be no less than 1:25.

---

<sup>4</sup> Teaching staffs of field practicum are not included.

<sup>5</sup> Field practicum is not included in this context.

<sup>6</sup> referring to recognized social work professional qualifications awarded overseas.

<sup>7</sup> "Post-degree" in the context throughout the document refers to "post-qualifying degree in social work".

<sup>8</sup> The requirement for post-degree experience in social work practice is only applicable to those recruited after 1 September 2005.

<sup>9</sup> referring to full-time or equivalent students

(B) Degree Programme<sup>10</sup>

- (a) All full-time staff of a social work programme, of which the staff size must be at least three, should each hold a post-graduate degree in social work or a related discipline.
- (b) Those who teach social work practice subjects should be an RSW or equivalent<sup>11</sup> and possess not less than five years' post-degree experience in social work practice<sup>12</sup>.
- (c) Fifty percent of the staff who possess a post-graduate degree and teach social work practice subjects<sup>13</sup> should each hold a doctoral degree. There is no restriction on the field of concentration of the doctoral degree.
- (d) The ratio of full-time academic staff and part-time academic staff, or equivalent, to student<sup>14</sup> of the programme should be no less than 1:15.

2.3.3 Teaching Staff of Field Practicum

- (A) Teachers of field practicum for local fieldwork placements must be RSWs, hold a degree in social work recognized by the Board for registration, and possess at least five years' post-degree practice experience<sup>15</sup> in social work posts that include direct practice with service users or work related to social welfare policy and management.
- (B) Teachers of field practicum for non-local fieldwork placements must hold a degree in social work recognized by the Board for registration and a professional qualification or status in social work equivalent to a registered social worker in Hong Kong. They should also possess at least five years' post-degree practice

---

<sup>10</sup> Including conversion degree programme.

<sup>11</sup> referring to recognized social work professional qualifications awarded overseas

<sup>12</sup> The requirement for post-degree experience in social work practice is only applicable to those recruited after 1 September 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Field practicum is not included in this context.

<sup>14</sup> referring to full-time or equivalent students

<sup>15</sup> For any teachers of field practicum that do not meet the requirement of practice experience in social work at the time of a qualification recognition exercise but have been employed in the position before this specific requirement is put into effect, i.e. before 6 September 2007, the TI concerned should provide the Assessment Team with justifications and full profile of those teaching staff members for consideration.



experience in social work posts that include direct practice with service users or work related to social welfare policy and management.

- (C) In addition to the requirements stipulated in 2.3.3(A) **or (B)**, the teachers of field practicum of a master degree programme in social work should also possess a post-graduate degree in social work or a related discipline.
- (D) To allow the TIs flexibility in maximizing the use of their human resources and to enrich social work students' exposure to professional knowledge of other disciplines, the expertise and experience of other academics and professions could also be drawn on. These include suitably qualified persons with appropriate and relevant training in a particular subject area such as counsellor, family therapist, play therapist, clinical/education psychologist and psychiatrist.
- (E) At least one fieldwork placement of each student should be supervised by teachers of field practicum who meet the criteria spelt out in 2.3.3(A), (B) and (C).

## 2.4 Academic Staff-to-student Ratio

- 2.4.1 The purpose of the Board to set a reasonable academic staff-to-student ratio is to ensure that ample individual attention is provided to students in nurturing them into professional social workers.
- 2.4.2 Courses that are specifically designed for the students of a social work programme should be counted in for the calculation of the academic staff-to-student ratio of that programme.
- 2.4.3 The students or the teachers of non-social work courses should not be counted in for the calculation of the academic staff-to-student ratio of a social work programme.
- 2.4.4 The academic staff-to-student ratio should basically be generated from the total number of full-time equivalent students of an individual social work programme divided by the number of full-time equivalent academic staff of that programme regardless of the departments which the teachers were under. In this connection, the TI under assessment or review should also provide a breakdown of the number of the full-time

equivalent academic staff in terms of the weight<sup>16</sup> of each of the academic staff put in the calculation.

- 2.4.5 The TI should provide primary data for the Assessment Team to verify the academic staff-to-student ratio reported by them. The fields where primary data are required are set out in 4.1.2(e) and 4.1.2(h) of Appendix C and 4.1.2(f) and 4.1.2(i) of Appendix D respectively.
- 2.4.6 A TI may confer a social work qualification that is led by two or more different modes of programmes, for example, full-time and part-time. Each mode of programme is regarded as an independent programme. In this case, the staff-to-student ratio of different programmes should be calculated and provided individually.
- 2.4.7 Academic staff in this context only refers to those stipulated under 2.3.2. TIs should not count those who do not fall within this category when calculating the academic staff-to-student ratio of an individual social work programme.
- 2.4.8 For a TI which is not on the Board's current list of recognized social work qualifications, at least three full-time academic staff members (also RSWs) are required for the programme it offers for conferring a social work qualification to be recognized by the Board for registration.
- 2.4.9 Among the academic staff of a social work programme offered by a TI which has already been put on the Board's current list of recognized social work qualifications, not less than 70 percent should be full-time staff.
- 2.4.10 It is understood that in general, the work time of an individual academic staff member may not be fully committed to a particular programme. In this case, the fractional input of time of individual academic staff members in the programme should be put together in calculating the academic staff-to-student ratio of a social work programme.
- 2.4.11 For converting the number of students of a part-time programme to a full-time equivalent figure, thereby to work out the academic staff-to-student ratio of the programme, TIs should observe the following principles:

(A) The number of full-time equivalent students of a part-time

---

<sup>16</sup> For example, the weight of a full-time academic staff member without any job commitment in other areas like administration or fieldwork supervision is "1".

programme will be generated from a fraction derived from the duration of a full-time programme (as numerator) and that of the part-time programme (as denominator). For example, if the duration of the full-time mode is two years and that of the part-time mode is three years, the fraction for reaching the number of full-time equivalent students will be two-thirds (2/3).

- (B) The fraction for reaching the number of full-time equivalent students of a part-time programme should be no less than one-half (1/2), regardless of the duration of the programme.

## 2.5 Academic Standard of Social Work School/Department

Apart from the internal programme validation carried out by the local TIs themselves, some TIs are at present subject to the assessment mechanism of the University Grants Committee (UGC). The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) also conducts institutional reviews, external programme validation and revalidation. The Board therefore will take into account of the TIs, the UGC and the HKCAAVQ's evaluation of the academic standard, the research output and teaching effectiveness of the various social work schools and departments. The UGC's assessment or the HKCAAVQ's accreditation of a certain programme, however, will not fetter the Board's decision as to whether to recognize the social work qualification concerned for registration.

## 2.6 Other Supporting Facilities

The Board expects that TIs will provide their students with sufficient supporting facilities as specified in the following:

- (A) There should be a reasonable collection of references related to social work including but not limited to books, refereed journals, on-line journals, and audio-visual references.
- (B) Skills laboratories should be equipped adequately to provide training and pre-placement activities to social work students.
- (C) There should be adequate facilities in information technology for social work students.
- (D) The setting of the campus should allow social work students sufficient space to organize activities including but not limited to meetings, seminars, group projects, interviews, consultations and supervisions.

### **3 Recognition of Social Work Qualifications Conferred via /Alternative Routes**

#### **3.1 Conversion Degree Programme**

TIs may provide alternatives by way of offering conversion degree programmes for graduates of sub-degree programmes in social work to top up their training and pursue a recognized bachelor degree in social work for registration. To facilitate the graduates of such programmes to be qualified for registration, the TIs should observe the following requirements:

- (A) Possessing a diploma, higher diploma or an associate degree in social work recognized by the Board for registration is a pre-requisite for students to be admitted to conversion degree programmes.
- (B) Unless otherwise specified, the requirements for degree programmes mentioned in this document are basically applicable to conversion degree programmes but no vice versa.
- (C) TIs should clearly specify the difference in the level of the curriculum content and structure between conversion degree programmes and sub-degree programmes.
- (D) TIs should justify that the students' learning experience from their previous sub-degree training to the conversion degree programmes are equivalent to those students admitted to a four-year degree programme via the first-year entry route.
- (E) The practicum should consist of a minimum of 400 hours' direct fieldwork placement.
- (F) The requirements for academic staff of a conversion degree programme should be the same as those for a regular four-year bachelor degree programme.
- (G) Any programme leading to a master degree must not be regarded as a conversion degree programme.

#### **3.2 Under-graduate Programmes Admitting Students via Other Routes**

Some TIs may admit students holding a sub-degree in social work or related disciplines in social science with good academic performance to the second or

the third year of their four-year degree programmes in social work via other routes. To facilitate those students to be qualified for registration after graduation, such TIs should fulfil the following requirements:

- (A) Those students' learning experiences from their previous sub-degree training to the four-year degree programme should be equivalent to those of the students admitted to a four-year degree programme via the first-year entry route.
- (B) The coverage of academic subjects, including social work core courses and field practicum (800 hours' fieldwork placement and 100 hours' placement preparation and related activities), for those students should be complete and equivalent to those for the students admitted to a four-year degree programme via the first-year entry route.

## **4 System for Qualification Recognition**

### **4.1 First Qualification Recognition Assessment**

- 4.1.1 A qualification recognition assessment, by means of assessing the pertinent programme, will be conducted for a social work qualification which is not yet recognized by the Board for registration.
- 4.1.2 The TI concerned will be required to submit to the Board a formal application for qualification recognition together with supporting documents for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements set out in this document.
- 4.1.3 For a TI which does not have a self-validation system, the accreditation of the pertinent programme granted by the HKCAAVQ will be a pre-requisite for a formal application to be filed with the Board. The TI, in its application, is required to submit to the Board the HKCAAVQ's approval documents, including any conditions, requirements, and recommendations that the Council has imposed on or suggested to the TI.
- 4.1.4 Upon receiving a formal application for qualification recognition from a TI, the Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration will recommend to the Board to assign members from the Assessment Panel<sup>17</sup> by rotation to form an assessment team to perform an

---

<sup>17</sup> A standing Assessment Panel is set up under the Board. Appointed by the Board, members of the Panel include local and overseas academics in social work, social work and non-social work professionals, and employers of social workers.

assessment. A list of Assessment Panel members is attached at Appendix A. The Assessment Team will conduct an assessment based on the guidelines as attached at Appendix B.

4.1.5 TIs will be required to bear the full cost incurred in a qualification recognition assessment.

4.1.6 The mechanism and procedures for a qualification recognition assessment are set out in detail in the Manual for Recognition Assessment of Qualifications in Social Work for Registration at Appendix C.

#### 4.2 First Recognition Review after Social Work Qualification Being Recognized by the Board for Registration

4.2.1 In normal circumstances, the Board will review its recognition of a social work qualification three years or a period as specified by the Board after the qualification is first recognized for registration. The review will be conducted by means of an assessment of the pertinent programme.

4.2.2 In normal circumstances, the Committee will recommend to the Board to assign an assessment team to conduct a qualification recognition review but may conduct a review on its own motion if it identifies such a need.

4.2.3 The TI will be required to bear the full cost incurred in a qualification recognition review.

4.2.4 The mechanism and procedures for the review are set out in detail in the Manual for Recognition Review of Qualifications in Social Work for Registration at Appendix D. A flow of procedures for a qualification recognition review is shown at Appendix E.

#### 4.3 Regular Qualification Recognition Review

4.3.1 Unless otherwise specified, the recognition of qualifications in social work, which are on the Board's current list of recognized social work qualifications, are subject to regular qualification recognition reviews at intervals not more than nine years. Such reviews will be conducted by means of assessments of the pertinent programmes normally performed by an assessment to be assigned by the Board.

4.3.2 If the TI under review confers more than one social work qualification

recognized by the Board for registration, the recognition of those qualifications may be reviewed in one single exercise.

4.3.3 TIs will be required to bear the full cost incurred in regular qualification recognition reviews.

4.3.4 The mechanism and procedures for the regular review are also stipulated in the Manual for Recognition Review of Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as attached at Appendix D. A flow of procedures for a regular qualification recognition review is shown at Appendix F.

## **5 Granting of Qualification Recognition**

Normally, it takes at least twelve months for the Board to process an application for qualification recognition. TIs are advised to observe the Board's schedule and submit its application for the Board's recognition of its academic qualification in social work to be conferred well before the first student intake of the pertinent programme. The Board will not grant retrospective recognition. Rather, it will only consider recognizing the social work qualification to be awarded to the cohort admitted from the academic year during which the Board receives the TI's application for recognition of that qualification.

## **6 Appeal Mechanism**

6.1 In the case where a TI is aggrieved by the Board's decision on qualification recognition, it may appeal to the Board against such a decision.

6.2 Details of the appeal mechanisms for qualification recognition assessments and reviews are set out in (5) of Appendices C and D respectively.

## **7 Recognition of Qualifications Led by "Off-shore" Programmes of Local TIs**

7.1 Local TIs may offer social work programmes on their own or in partnership with other TIs outside Hong Kong and award social work qualifications bearing the same names as those already recognized by the Board for registration. The Board will not automatically recognize those awards led by such "off-shore" programmes.

7.2 Holders of social work qualifications led by the "off-shore" programmes mentioned in 7.1 may apply for registration. The Board will deal with these applications and assess the programmes on a case-by-case basis according to the latest edition of this document.

- 7.3 The mechanism mentioned in 7.2 is applicable only to the social work qualifications conferred before 6 September 2007, when the Board resolved this measure. Applications from holders of such social work qualifications awarded after that date will not be entertained.

## **8 Recognition of Non-local Social Work Qualifications**

In view of the manpower and resource constraints, a comprehensive assessment of individual non-local social work training programme is beyond the present capability of the Board. Therefore, the Board adopts the following benchmark approach in appraising the accreditation mechanisms of non-local accreditation and registration bodies:

- (A) For qualifications awarded by a country with a well-established accreditation body, the principles, criteria and standards for accreditation of that body would be scrutinized and compared with the Board's own standards to ascertain whether the programmes accredited by that accreditation body would also lead to social work qualifications to be recognized for registration in Hong Kong. Having been satisfied that the qualification standards and accreditation parameters of an overseas accreditation body are comparable to or higher than those of an equivalent programme in Hong Kong, the Board would, in principle, recognize the qualification led by the social work programme accredited by that accreditation body.
- (B) For qualifications awarded by a country without a well-established accreditation and registration body, or whose accreditation principles are not accepted by the Board as comparable, submission of an assessment report on such a qualification issued by the HKCAAVQ is a pre-requisite for the holder to apply for registration. The HKCAAVQ's assessment report, however, will not fetter the Board's decision on the application for registration or the basis of approval. A fair assessment of the qualification would be conducted by the Board on an individual basis with reference to the following:
- (a) the criteria and standards set out in this document;
  - (b) a comparison of the course content, programme structure, and professional qualifications of teaching staff to establish whether the professional standards of the programme are equivalent to those of a comparable programme in Hong Kong;



- (c) an assessment to be conducted by external assessors, mainly prominent academics in social work who may come from the awarding country and/or have good knowledge of the awarding institution, to establish whether the features of the pertinent programme meet the requirements set out in this document; and
- (d) any other standards and criteria as the Board considers appropriate.

## **9 Applicability of the Principles**

The current edition of the Principles is a valid reference for qualification recognition assessments, qualification recognition reviews, regular qualification recognition reviews, or any assessments of social work programmes for qualification recognition or registration purpose to be conducted at the time.

## **10 Compliance during Period of Programme Provision**

- 10.1 TIs should make sure that their social work programmes comply with the requirements set out in this document at all times during the period of programme provision. Any violation of the programmes from the criteria and standards as required may adversely affect the Board's recognition of the social work qualification led by the programme and the registration of the prospective graduates.
- 10.2 TIs should report to the Board from time to time any changes in or matters related to their programmes that may significantly affect the recognized status of the social work qualifications led by those programmes.

## **11 Review of Mechanisms for Qualification Recognition and the Principles**

The Board may review the mechanism for qualification recognition and amend the Principles from time to time as it considers appropriate. Before new measures are put into effect, the Board will consult TIs on major amendments to the Principles so proposed.

1 September 2015

**Appendix A**  
**List of Assessment Panel Members**

To be appointed.

## **Appendix B**

### **Guidelines for Assessment Team**

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board) is established under the Social Workers Registration Ordinance, Chapter 505 (the Ordinance). It is stipulated in section 7(1)(b) of the Ordinance that “the Board shall set and review the qualification standards for registration as a registered social worker (RSW) and related registration matters”, and section 7(1)(c) that “subject to subsection (2), assess qualifications to ascertain whether they should be set under paragraph (b)”. Within this statutory framework, the Board has to assume the responsibility to assess the social work qualifications conferred by various tertiary institutions (TIs) by assessing the pertinent programmes to ascertain whether those qualifications should be recognized for registration.
- 1.2 To ensure the credibility and acceptability of the Board’s recognition of social work qualifications for registration, the Board has formulated a mechanism to solicit external expertise and assistance in conducting recognition assessments on qualifications led by new social work programmes by means of assessing those programmes and recognition reviews of the currently recognized social work qualifications by means of reassessing the pertinent programmes. The Board anticipates that the external force thus introduced will bring in new visions and balanced views to make the exercises fair and comprehensive and, in the long run, drive and upkeep the programmes in line with the internationally comparable standard.

#### **2 Assessment Panel and Assessment Team**

- 2.1 The Board has set up an Assessment Panel to undertake qualification recognition assessment and review tasks. A range of stakeholders including social work academics (both local and overseas), social work and non-social work professionals, and employers of social workers are appointed to the Panel. The Board will make all reasonable efforts to ensure a balanced mix of gender and expertise among Panel members.
- 2.2 An assessment team will be formed to conduct an individual assessment or review task. The Assessment Team will assume a significant role as the primary gatekeeper of the professional quality of social work graduates.

### **3 Terms of Reference of Assessment Team**

#### **3.1 Power and Responsibilities**

As assigned by the Board, an assessment team is to assume the following responsibilities:

- (A) to conduct a recognition assessment of a qualification in social work not yet recognized by the Board for registration;
- (B) to conduct a recognition review<sup>1</sup> of a qualification in social work three years, or a period as specified otherwise, after it is recognized by the Board for registration by means of assessing the pertinent programme;
- (C) to conduct a regular recognition review of a qualification in social work currently recognized by the Board for registration at a specified interval by means of assessing the pertinent programme; and
- (D) via the Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration (the Committee) set up under the Board, to report and recommend to the Board with regard to the result of the assessment of a social work programme as mentioned above, in which case, the Board makes the final decision on any qualification recognition review or assessment.

#### **3.2 Composition**

3.2.1 In normal circumstances, an assessment team will be composed of at least one member from each of the following groups:

- (a) local academics in social work
- (b) overseas academics in social work
- (c) social work professionals
- (d) employers of social workers (representatives of agencies' senior management)
- (e) non-social work professionals

3.2.2 For a regular qualification recognition review, an assessment team may be composed of at least one member from each of the following groups:

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the stipulations on a qualification recognition review are also applicable to a regular qualification recognition review.

- (a) local or overseas academic in social work;
- (b) social work professional
- (c) employer of social workers or non social work professional

3.2.3 If a regular qualification recognition review is conducted for a TI that confers more than one recognized social work qualifications for recognition, the responsible Assessment Team may consist of five members as mentioned in 3.2.1.

3.2.4 Members of an individual Assessment Team will elect from among themselves a convenor of the Team. Preferably, the overseas academic in social work as assigned, where appropriate, may be the convenor of the Team.

3.2.5 The Board may determine the size and composition of an assessment team as it considers appropriate.

3.2.6 Subject to the basic qualification being met, any local or overseas academic in social work already appointed as a member of the Assessment Panel is not necessarily still in the teaching post at the time of being appointed as a member of an Assessment Team.

### 3.3 Tenure of Office

3.3.1 In normal circumstances, an assessment team will be dissolved after completing an assessment or review and submitting to the Board its report and recommendation.

3.3.2 Where necessary, the Board may extend the tenure of office of an assessment team as specified at the time.

3.3.3 In the event that a member of an assessment team ceases to serve in the Team for whatever reason, the Board will try to appoint another member as far as possible to fill the office thus vacated for a term until the Team's task has been accomplished.

3.3.4 In the event that the convenor of an assessment team ceases to serve in the Team for whatever reason, while the Board will endeavour to appoint another member to fill the office thus vacated, members should elect a new convenor among themselves to maintain the normal operation of the Team.

## **4 Guidelines for Recognition Assessment and Review**

### **4.1 Conduct and Ethics of Assessment Team Members**

- 4.1.1 Where necessary, Assessment Team members are required to declare interest<sup>2</sup> before an appointment is confirmed.
- 4.1.2 The Assessment Team should conduct a qualification recognition assessment or review in an open, objective and impartial manner. Its assessment should be fair and comprehensive. In any circumstances, the Team should not compromise the requirements stipulated in the Principles.
- 4.1.3 The Assessment Team should observe professional ethics.
- 4.1.4 For each qualification recognition assessment or review, the Assessment Team will receive from TIs documentation according to a list of submissions drawn up by the Board. All such documentation should be regarded as restricted. Team members should not disclose any details of any documents received to any parties outside the Board without the consent of the individual TI and the Board. The documentation should be returned to the Board office for disposal upon the completion of a qualification recognition exercise.
- 4.1.5 While the Assessment Team members possess great expertise in their professions, they should, in the process of an assessment or a review, refrain from or avoid being perceived as intervening in or infringing the academic autonomy of an individual TI.

### **4.2 Reference Documents**

The Assessment Team, when carrying out an assessment or review, is required to observe the rules and procedures laid down in the following documents drawn up by the Board:

- (a) Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as Registered Social Workers and all the Appendices; and

---

<sup>2</sup> The contexts of “interest” may include all previous and current positions held, remunerated and volunteer appointments in any departments or committees of the TI concerned, or any form of collaboration between the TI concerned and the TI or organization which an individual member is working with.

- (b) any other relevant documents that may be determined by the Board in an individual assignment.

#### 4.3 Procedures for Assessment on Programme(s)

- 4.3.1 With the assistance of the Board office and the Professional Consultant, the Assessment Team may determine its work schedule for meetings, campus visits and interviews in the process of an assessment or review as it considers appropriate.
- 4.3.2 Each Assessment Team will work on only one TI in one exercise.
- 4.3.3 For a social work qualification not yet recognized by the Board for registration, a qualification recognition assessment should be conducted. The Assessment Team as assigned by the Board will conduct an assessment on the pertinent programme only.
- 4.3.4 For a social work qualification which has been first recognized by the Board for registration for a maximum period of three years, a qualification recognition review will be conducted. The Assessment Team as assigned by the Board will conduct an assessment of the pertinent programme only.
- 4.3.5 In normal circumstances, a regular qualification recognition review should be conducted at intervals of not more than nine years for a social work qualification after its first qualification recognition review mentioned in 4.3.4. Where the TI under review confers more than one social work qualification currently recognized by the Board, the Team may assess all pertinent programmes in that review in one go. In that case, the assessment process, especially the on-campus visit, may be prolonged.
- 4.3.6 Individual TIs may launch their own internal programme revalidation or undergo revalidation process conducted by other accreditation bodies such as the Hong Kong Council on Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications. The results of such revalidation exercises conducted within two years before a regular qualification recognition review is initiated may be taken into account. In this case, if the responsible Assessment Team, after perusing all the relevant documents on revalidation submitted by the TI concerned and considering the context of it, finds substantial evidence that in some areas, the programme(s) being assessed has basically met the Board's requirements, the Team may speed up part of the process as it considers

appropriate.

- 4.3.7 As part of its qualification recognition assessment or review, the Assessment Team may, at its discretion, meet with the senior management of the TI, academic staff, fieldwork supervisors (including those employed by the TI and those employed by placement agencies), students, or the latest cohort of graduates of the programme being assessed, or all. If appropriate, the Assessment Team may also interview the employing agencies of the latest cohort of graduates of that programme.
- 4.3.8 In normal circumstances, the Board does not expect any exemption of course credit for students of any social work programmes. Where an exemption is called for, the Assessment Team should seek the principles and justifications for such exemption from the TI concerned.
- 4.3.9 In the process of an assessment or review, the Assessment Team may seek directive from the Committee should it encounter any special circumstances.
- 4.3.10 Where necessary, the Board may, via the Committee, ask the Assessment Team to report progress of a qualification recognition assessment or review.

#### 4.4 Report and Recommendations

- 4.4.1 The Assessment Team should submit to the Board its report on qualification recognition assessment or qualification recognition review as soon as practicable.
- 4.4.2 Where necessary, the Assessment Team may communicate with the TI on the drafting of the report on assessment or review.
- 4.4.3 The report, including the Team's recommendation, should be submitted to the Board via the Committee for consideration and endorsement. In the circumstances, before the Board endorses the report and the recommendation(s), the Assessment Team should not communicate with the TI regarding the Team's recommendation(s) related to the result of the assessment of the programme concerned.
- 4.4.4 The Assessment Team's report on assessment or review should be concise but comprehensive. It should at least include the following features of the assessed programme(s):



- (a) philosophy and objectives
- (b) level of award
- (c) content and structure
- (d) quality of the teaching team
- (e) academic staff-to-student ratio
- (f) teaching and learning strategies
- (g) expected and actual output
- (h) admission criteria and procedures, and number of student intake and attrition
- (i) form of assessment of student performance, approach for student evaluation, route to the award and mechanism for assuring graduates' professional standard
- (j) student support – academic counselling and personal guidance
- (k) supporting facilities including library, skills laboratory and information technology facilities
- (l) programme leadership and management
- (m) quality assurance – internal evaluation and re-validation mechanism
- (n) changes since last recognition assessment or review
- (o) outcomes of changes, e.g. TI's responses to changes, implication of changes on students or other aspects
- (p) anticipated programme changes – future development and innovative practice

4.4.5 If a social work qualification is led by different modes of programme, for example, full-time and part-time, each mode of the programme will be regarded as an independent programme. The Assessment Team should submit separate reports for the individual modes of the programme.

4.4.6 If the TI under a regular qualification recognition review involves more than one social work qualification, the Team should submit a consolidated report which contains separate reports on the respective qualifications.

4.4.7 After a qualification recognition assessment, the Assessment Team will normally recommend to the Board that the social work qualification be recognized for registration for a maximum period of three years unless otherwise specified.

4.4.8 After a qualification recognition review or a regular qualification recognition review, the Assessment Team will normally recommend to

the Board that the social work qualification(s) be recognized for registration for a maximum period of eight years unless otherwise specified.

4.4.9 Subject to the Board's endorsement of the report on assessment or review put forth by the Assessment Team, and/or the incorporation of the opinions of the Board and/or the Committee, if any, the Board will forward the report to the TI for views and response.

4.4.10 The Committee, as delegated by the Board, will follow up with the TI on matters arising from the report as well as the TI's views and response.

## **5 Honorarium for Assessment Team Members**

The Board may remunerate Assessment Team members for conducting a qualification recognition assessment or review in the form of an honorarium on a job basis.

## **6 Review of Qualification Recognition System**

Assessment Panel members are welcome to forward to the Board their observations and opinions on the qualification recognition mechanism. Their views in this respect will contribute significantly to the refinement of the Board's qualification recognition system.

**Appendix C**  
**Manual for Recognition Assessment of**  
**Qualifications in Social Work for Registration**

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board) is empowered by the Social Workers Registration Ordinance, Chapter 505, (the Ordinance) to “set and review the qualification standards for registration as a registered social worker (RSW) and related registration matters”. For this purpose, the Board has drawn up a set of Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as Registered Social Workers (the Principles). To gate-keep the quality of the programmes leading to the qualifications to be recognized for registration, the Board has developed a qualification recognition mechanism by means of assessing the pertinent programmes.
- 1.2 The qualification recognition mechanism will play an important role in safeguarding the quality of social work graduates and contribute to the continuous improvement of social work education and professional training, which is crucial in cultivating a strong force of competent and responsible professional social workers. The Board believes that the successful implementation of the qualification recognition policy will ultimately help sustain the spirit of the Ordinance in protecting vulnerable service users.

**2 Framework of Qualification Recognition Assessment**

- 2.1 The qualification recognition assessment is aimed at ensuring that programme providers will abide by the requirements set out in the Principles in providing programmes leading to social work qualifications to be recognized by the Board for registration, thereby assuring the quality of their social work programmes and the professional standard of the graduates.
- 2.2 Normally within six months after receiving a formal application for qualification recognition from a tertiary institution (TI), a qualification recognition assessment will be conducted by an Assessment Team to be assigned by the Board.
- 2.3 In normal circumstances, upon the recommendation of the Assessment Team, the Board may recognize the social work qualification for a maximum of three years. The recognition of the social work qualification will be reviewed not more than three years after being granted.

- 2.4 Each Assessment Team will work on only one TI in one exercise.
- 2.5 To conduct a qualification recognition assessment, the Assessment Team will rely solely on the rules and procedures laid down in the following documents:
- (a) Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as Registered Social Workers;
  - (b) this Manual;
  - (c) Guidelines for the Assessment Team; and
  - (d) any other relevant documents that may be determined by the Board in an individual assessment.
- 2.6 The Assessment Team reports to the Board via the Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration (the Committee). Where necessary, an Assessment Team may seek directive from the Committee should it encounter any special circumstances.
- 2.7 Normally, an Assessment Team will look into the following features of a programme:
- (a) philosophy and objectives
  - (b) level of award
  - (c) content and structure
  - (d) quality of the teaching team
  - (e) academic staff-to-student ratio
  - (f) teaching and learning strategies
  - (g) expected and actual output
  - (h) admission criteria and procedures and number of student intake
  - (i) form of assessment of student performance, approach for student evaluation, route to the award and mechanism for assuring graduates' professional standard
  - (j) student support – academic counselling and personal guidance
  - (k) supporting facilities including library, skills laboratory and information technology facilities
  - (l) programme leadership and management
  - (m) quality assurance – internal evaluation and re-validation mechanism
  - (n) plan for programmes changes – future development and innovative practice

### **3 Formation of Assessment Team**

The Board will select members from the Assessment Panel to form an Assessment Team. The Team may consist of one member from each of the following groups:

- (a) local academics in social work
- (b) overseas academics in social work
- (c) social work professionals
- (d) employers of social workers (representatives of agencies' senior management)
- (e) non-social work professionals

### **4 Procedures for Qualification Recognition Assessment**

#### **4.1 Preparation for Recognition Assessment**

4.1.1 It may take at least twelve months for the Board to process an application for qualification recognition. A TI should therefore submit its application for qualification recognition well before the admission of the first cohort of the pertinent programme.

4.1.2 An application for qualification recognition should normally include the following documentation:

- (a) full set of approval documents, including recommendations and conditions, if any, for the approval, issued by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) upon its accreditation of the programme (applicable to those TIs where an internal validation mechanism is not available)
- (b) full set of documents on self-validation, if applicable
- (c) programme prospectus
- (d) teaching approach and strategies
- (e) teaching load of academic staff
  - (i) list of courses taught by each academic staff member
  - (ii) total number of teaching hours of each course during the year
- (f) profiles of all academic staff and fieldwork supervisors
- (g) plan of student intake, and documents related to admission procedures
- (h) elements for arriving at the academic staff-to-student ratio
  - (i) number of students

- (ii) number of full-time academic staff (in terms of employment)
- (iii) number of part-time academic staff (in terms of employment)
- (iv) number of full-time equivalent academic staff
- (v) Weight of each full-time equivalent academic staff member committed to the programme
- (i) practice for student evaluation and procedures to award of qualification
- (j) reference documents on students' language proficiency, if any
- (k) student support-related policies
- (l) monitoring system and policies, the latest internal and/or external evaluation, if any
- (m) plan for future development – continuous improvement, new target for next year and expected changes for a longer term

(Note: Unless otherwise specified, the figures and information required in 4.1.2 refer to those involved in the programme under assessment.)

4.1.3 To expedite and smooth the assessment, TIs should cooperate with the Board in submitting documents within the prescribed timescales. Any delay of the TI in submitting the required documents may adversely affect the schedule and in turn the Board's recognition of the concerning social work qualification for registration.

## 4.2 Assessment Procedures

4.2.1 The Assessment Team will notify the TI of the action plan for the assessment before the Team kicks off its agenda.

4.2.2 The Assessment Team may carry out the following course of action on the assessment:

- (a) Peruse the documentation submitted by the TI and, where necessary, request for supplementary documents from the TI.
- (b) Pay an on-campus visit to the TI.
- (c) Meet with the senior management of the TI and/or teaching staff of the social work school/department.
- (d) Meet with social work students, if applicable.
- (e) Meet with prospective placement agencies.
- (f) Discuss with the personnel of the TI on report drafting.

4.2.3 The Assessment Team and the TI will agree upon the date of visit and the schedule of meetings with the parties concerned.

### 4.3 Report on Qualification Recognition Assessment

- 4.3.1 The Assessment Team will submit to the Board via the Committee a report on the qualification recognition assessment. The report will include details of the Assessment Team's examination of the features of the programmes listed in 2.8 and its recommendation. Where necessary, the Assessment Team may communicate with the TI on the drafting of the report.
- 4.3.2 Subject to the Board's endorsement of the report and recommendation put forth by the Assessment Team, and/or the incorporation of any opinions of the Board and the Committee, the Board will forward the report to the TI for views and response. Such a report is regarded as an interim report issued to the TI.
- 4.3.3 In normal circumstances, the Board will issue the interim report to the TI in about three months after the Assessment Team confirms in writing to the TI regarding the Team's completion of the assessment process. This process may include the TI's submission of all documents required, the Assessment Team's examination of the documents and meetings with all the parties concerned as well as on-campus visits.
- 4.3.4 If the Board, based on the Assessment Team's recommendation and the Committee's opinions, if any, considers that the programme leading to the social work qualification in the TI's application fails to meet the requirements set out in the Principles, the Board will advise the TI of the areas to improve and set reasonable timescales for the TI to take remedial action. The TI may also be required to provide an action plan for improvement.
- 4.3.5 The TI will be given 28 days to respond to the interim report.
- 4.3.6 The Committee, as delegated by the Board, will follow up with the TI on matters arising from the interim report and the TI's views and response.
- 4.3.7 The Committee may proceed to re-examine whether the TI has taken necessary remedial action and made satisfactory improvement as advised. In the course of its re-examination, the Committee may pay visits to the TI.
- 4.3.8 After collecting views from the TI on the interim report, the Board will

issue a final report on the qualification recognition assessment, together with its notice of decision on the TI's application in about three months, depending on whether a re-examination is required and the complexity of it.

#### 4.4 Recognition or Refusal of Recognition of Qualification for Registration

4.4.1 Where the Board believes that the programme leading to the social work qualification in the TI's application meets the Board's requirements set out in the Principles, the Board may approve the TI's application and recognize the qualification for registration for a maximum period of three years. The recognition is subject to review after three years, or a period to be determined by the Board.

4.4.2 The Board may grant conditional approval to a TI's application for qualification recognition if it considers that the programme leading to the social work qualification in the application in general meets the Board's requirements set out in the Principles but has remediable shortfalls in some particular areas. As a result, the Board will conditionally recognize the social work qualification for registration for a specified period. The TI will be notified of the details of the conditions in the Board's notice of decision. If the TI fails to fulfil the conditions in a prescribed timescale, the Board may withdraw its conditional recognition of the social work qualification for registration.

4.4.3 The Board may refuse a TI's application for qualification recognition if, based on the report and recommendation submitted by the Assessment Team after a qualification recognition assessment and the opinions, if any, put forth by the Committee, the programme leading to the social work qualification in the TI's application fails to comply with the requirements set out in the Principles.

4.4.4 The Board will serve in writing a notice of its decision under 4.4.1, 4.4.2 or 4.4.3, together with the final report on the qualification recognition assessment, on the president of the TI, with a copy of it to the social work school/department.

## **5 Grievance and Appeal**

5.1 The Board, the responsible Assessment Teams and the TI concerned should try to resolve any disagreements or disputes through mutual understanding and agreement.



- 5.2 The TI may appeal against the Board's decision on the refusal of recognizing a social work qualification for registration as a result of qualification recognition assessment.
- 5.3 An appeal should be made to the Board within 28 days from the delivery date of the notice of decision served on the TI by the Board.
- 5.4 Upon receiving an appeal, the Board will appoint an independent Appeals Panel to review the Board's decision and the procedures in respect of the qualification recognition assessment.
- 5.5 The Appeals Panel will consist of prominent members of different professions. The members of the Appeals Panel will be independent of the Board and the Assessment Panel.
- 5.6 In its investigation, the Appeals Panel may hear oral submissions and/or documentary evidence provided by the TI.
- 5.7 The Appeals Panel may reach one of the following decisions:
- (a) to uphold the Board's original decision, in which case the Appeals Panel's decision will be final; or
  - (b) not to uphold the Board's original decision. *(amended on 31 July 2018)*
- 5.8 In normal circumstances, a TI will be allowed to appeal only once for each application for qualification recognition.

## **6 Notification on Changes after Application Submitted**

- 6.1 TIs are required to notify the Board as soon as practicable of any material changes in the pertinent social work programme after it has submitted its application for qualification recognition. Areas that involve changes may include but are not limited to:
- (a) teaching mode of the programme
  - (b) course content and structure
  - (c) title of award
  - (d) staff and resources
  - (e) admission requirements and route to award

- (f) number of student intake
- (g) student support
- (h) off-campus programmes

6.2 Supporting documents in respect of the changes should be submitted to the Board for examination. After receiving the TI's notification on changes, the Board will consider whether any further action should be taken. The TI will be informed in writing accordingly.

6.3 In any circumstances, any changes in a programme should not lead to any deviation of the programme from the Principles in any aspect.

6.4 Any delay in reporting changes may adversely affect the Board's recognition of the qualification led by the programme and in turn affect the registration of its prospective graduates.

## **7 Review of Mechanism for Qualification Recognition**

The Board may review the mechanism for qualification recognition and amend this Manual from time to time as it considers appropriate. Nevertheless, the Board will consult TIs on major amendments to the mechanism as proposed before new measures are implemented.

**Appendix D**  
**Manual for Recognition Review of**  
**Qualifications in Social Work for Registration**

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Social Workers Registration Board (the Board) is empowered by the Social Workers Registration Ordinance (the Ordinance) to “set and review the qualification standards for registration as a registered social worker (RSW) and related registration matters”. For this purpose, the Board has drawn up a set of Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as Registered Social Workers (the Principles). To gate-keep the quality of the programmes leading to the qualifications currently recognized for registration, the Board will review its recognition of those qualifications by means of assessing the pertinent programmes.
- 1.2 The qualification recognition review mechanism will play an important role in safe-guarding the quality of social work graduates and contribute to the continuous improvement of social work education and professional training, which is crucial in cultivating a strong force of competent and responsible professional social workers. The Board believes that the successful implementation of the qualification recognition review policy will ultimately help sustain the spirit of the Ordinance in protecting vulnerable service users.

**2 Framework of Qualification Recognition Review**

- 2.1 The qualification recognition review<sup>1</sup> is aimed at ensuring that social work programme providers on the Board’s list of social work qualifications recognized for registration will continuously abide by the requirements set out in the Principles and endeavour to upkeep the quality of their programme(s) and the professional standard of their graduates.
- 2.2 Qualification recognition reviews will be conducted in two tiers. The Board’s recognition of a social work qualification awarded by a TI will be reviewed not more than three years after such recognition has been first granted. Thereafter, a regular qualification recognition review will be conducted at intervals of not more than nine years.
- 2.3 In normal circumstances, an Assessment Team assigned by the Board will conduct the qualification recognition review.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the stipulations on a qualification recognition review are also applicable to a regular qualification recognition review.

- 2.4 Where appropriate, the Board may initiate a recognition review of a recognized qualification while not necessarily observing the review schedule as mentioned in 2.2. A reasonable notice will be given to the TI concerned for prior arrangements.
- 2.5 To preclude overlapping workload and save TIs' resources, the Board will, as far as practicable, schedule a qualification recognition review that may match the re-validation or review of the pertinent social work programme(s) to be launched on their own motion or by other accreditation bodies.
- 2.6 A TI may be offering more than one programme that leads to a social work qualification recognized by the Board for registration. In this case, an Assessment Team may conduct a regular qualification recognition review on a TI basis.
- 2.7 Each Assessment Team will work on only one TI in a regular qualification recognition review.
- 2.8 To conduct a recognition review, the Assessment Team will rely solely on the rules and procedures laid down in the following documents:
- (a) Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognizing Qualifications in Social Work for Registration as Registered Social Workers;
  - (b) this Manual;
  - (c) Guidelines for the Assessment Team; and
  - (d) any other relevant documents that may be determined by the Board in an individual assessment.
- 2.9 The Assessment Team reports to the Board via the Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration (the Committee). Where necessary, an Assessment Team may seek directive from the Committee should it encounter any special circumstances.
- 2.10 Normally, an Assessment Team will look into the following features of a programme:
- (a) philosophy and objectives
  - (b) level of award
  - (c) content and structure

- (d) quality of the teaching team
- (e) academic staff-to-student ratio
- (f) teaching and learning strategies
- (g) expected and actual output
- (h) admission criteria and procedures and number of student intake and attrition
- (i) form of assessment of student performance, approach for student evaluation, route to the award and mechanism for assuring graduates' professional standard
- (j) student support – academic counselling and personal guidance
- (k) supporting facilities including library, skills laboratory and information technology facilities
- (l) programme leadership and management
- (m) quality assurance – internal evaluation and re-validation mechanism
- (n) changes since last recognition assessment or review
- (o) outcomes of changes, for example, TI's responses to changes, implication of changes on students or other aspects, etc.
- (p) anticipated programme changes – future development and innovative practice

### **3 Formation of Assessment Team**

#### **3.1 Qualification Recognition Review after First Recognition**

The Board will select members from the Assessment Panel to form an Assessment Team. The Team may consist of one member from each of the following categories:

- (a) local academic in social work
- (b) overseas academic in social work
- (c) social work professional
- (d) employers of social worker (representatives of agencies' senior management)
- (e) non-social work professional

#### **3.2 Regular Qualification Recognition Review**

- (a) The Assessment Team for a regular qualification recognition review may consist of one member from each of the following categories:
  - (i) local academic or overseas academic in social work;
  - (ii) social work professional
  - (iii) employer of social workers or non social work professional

- (b) If a regular qualification recognition review is conducted for a TI that confers more than one recognized social work qualifications for registration, the Assessment Team to be assigned for the task may consist of five members as mentioned in 3.1.

#### **4 Procedures for Qualification Recognition Review**

##### **4.1 Preparation for the Review**

- 4.1.1 No less than twelve months before an intended qualification recognition review will the Board notify the target TI for the latter's preparation.
- 4.1.2 The TI will be advised to provide the Board with documentation that facilitates the review. The documentation may include:
  - (a) full set of documents, including recommendations and conditions (if any) , issued by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications after the revalidation, of the programme, if available (applicable to those TIs where an internal validation mechanism is not available)
  - (b) full set of reports and documents regarding the latest internal revalidation that the TI has undergone, if applicable
  - (c) the latest programme prospectus
  - (d) changes in the programme since the qualification recognition assessment or the preceding qualification recognition review, and the outcomes of changes
  - (e) teaching approach and strategies
  - (f) teaching load of academic staff
    - (i) list of courses taught by each academic staff member
    - (ii) total number of teaching hours of each course during the year under assessment
  - (g) profiles of all academic staff and fieldwork supervisors
  - (h) data of student intake and attrition, and documents related to admission procedures
  - (i) elements for arriving at the academic staff-to-student ratio
    - (i) number of students
    - (ii) number of full-time academic staff (in terms of employment)
    - (iii) number of part-time academic staff (in terms of employment)
    - (iv) number of full-time equivalent academic staff
    - (v) weight of each full-time equivalent academic staff member committed to the programme under review

- (j) practice for student evaluation and procedures to award of qualification
- (k) reference documents on students' language proficiency
- (l) academic and award achievement of the latest cohort of graduates – expected and actual outcomes
- (m) employment status and feedback and returns, if any, by employers of the latest cohort of graduates
- (n) student support-related policies
- (o) monitoring system and policies, the latest internal and/or external evaluation or re-validation reports, and the TI's responsive measures taken, if any
- (p) plan for future development – continuous improvement, new target for next year and expected changes for a longer term
- (q) documents regarding the outcomes of changes mentioned in (o), for example, the TI's response to the changes

(Note: Unless otherwise specified, the figures and information required in 4.1.2 refer to those involved in the programme under assessment.)

4.1.3 The TI will be advised to submit the documentation on or before a specified date. The Board undertakes to give a reasonable and feasible notice to the TI for submitting the documentation.

4.1.4 To expedite and smooth the review, TIs should cooperate with the Board in submitting documents within the prescribed timescales. Any delay of the TI in submitting the required documents may adversely affect the review schedule and in turn the continued recognition of the concerning social work qualification(s) by the Board for registration.

## 4.2 Review Process

### 4.2.1 Qualification Recognition Review

- (a) The Assessment Team will notify the TI of the action plan for the review before the Team kicks off its agenda.
- (b) An Assessment Team may carry out the following course of action on the review:
  - (i) Peruse the documentation submitted by the TI and, where necessary, request from the TI for supplementary documents.
  - (ii) Pay an on-campus visit to the TI.

- (iii) Meet with the senior management of the TI and/or teaching staff of the social work school/department
  - (iv) Meet with social work students or the latest cohort of graduates, or both.
  - (v) Meet with placement agencies.
  - (vi) Meet with employers of social work graduates.
  - (vii) Discuss with the personnel of the TI on report drafting.
- (c) The Assessment Team and the TI will agree upon the date of visit and the schedule for meetings with the parties concerned.

#### 4.2.2 Regular Qualification Recognition Review

- (a) The course of action taken by the Assessment Team for a regular review will be basically the same as that mentioned in 4.2.1(b).
- (b) A TI may confer more than one social work qualification currently recognized by the Board for registration. In this case, the regular qualification recognition review should cover all the pertinent programmes. It is expected that the assessment process, especially the on-campus visit, will be prolonged.
- (c) Individual TIs may undergo internal or external revalidation. The Board may take into account the pertinent report(s) on such internal or external re-validation conducted within two years before the review is initiated. In this case, if the responsible Assessment Team, after examining all the relevant documents submitted by the TI concerned and considering the context of the TI, finds substantial evidence that in some areas, the programme(s) being assessed has basically met the Board's requirements, the Team, while still conducting the assessment as assigned, may speed up part of the process as it considers appropriate.

#### 4.3 Report on Qualification Recognition Review

4.3.1 The Assessment Team will submit to the Board via the Committee a report on the qualification recognition review. The report will include details of the Assessment Team's examination of the features of the programmes as listed in 2.10 and its recommendation. Where necessary, the Assessment Team may communicate with the TI on the drafting of the report.

4.3.2 In a regular qualification recognition review that involves more than



one social work qualification, the responsible Assessment Team will submit a consolidated report which contains separate reports on the respective qualifications.

- 4.3.3 Subject to the Board's endorsement of the report and recommendations put forth by the Assessment Team, and the incorporation of any opinions of the Board and/or the Committee, the Board will forward the report to the TI for views and response. Such a report is regarded as an interim report issued to the TI.
- 4.3.4 In normal circumstances, the Board will issue the interim report to the TI in about three months after the Assessment Team has confirmed in writing to the TI regarding the Team's completion of the assessment process. This process may include the TI's submission of all documents required, the Assessment Team's examination of the documents and meetings with all the parties concerned as well as on-campus visits.
- 4.3.5 If the Board, based on the Assessment Team's recommendation and the Committee's opinions, if any, considers that the programme leading to the social work qualification concerned fails to meet the requirements set out in the Principles, the Board will advise the TI of the areas to improve and set reasonable timescales for the TI to take remedial action. The TI may also be required to provide the Board with an action plan for improvement.
- 4.3.6 The TI will be given 28 days to respond to the interim report.
- 4.3.7 The Committee, as delegated by the Board, will follow up with the TI on matters arising from the interim report and the TI's views and response.
- 4.3.8 The Committee may proceed to re-examine whether the TI has taken necessary remedial action and made satisfactory improvement as advised. In the course of its re-examination, the Committee may pay visits to the TI.
- 4.3.9 After collecting views from the TI on the interim report, the Board will issue a final report on the qualification recognition review, together with its notice of decision on the review in about three months, depending on whether a re-examination is required and the complexity of it.

#### 4.4 Continued Recognition

- 4.4.1 Where the Board believes that the programme(s) leading to the recognized social work qualification(s) for registration continues to meet the Board's requirements set out in the Principles, the Board may continue recognizing the qualification(s) for registration for a maximum period of eight years.
- 4.4.2 The Board may continue recognizing a social work qualification for registration on condition for a specified period if it considers that the programme leading to the qualification in general meets the Board's requirements set out in the Principles but has remediable shortfalls in some particular areas. The TI will be notified of the details of the conditions in the Board's notice of decision. If the TI fails to fulfil the conditions in a prescribed timescale, the Board may withdraw its conditional recognition of the social work qualification for registration.
- 4.4.3 For a regular qualification recognition review conducted for a TI that confers more than one recognized social work qualification for registration, the Board's decision on continued recognition may vary among individual qualifications. In this case, qualifications led by social work programmes that meet the Board's requirements may continue being recognized by the Board for registration while others led by programmes that do not meet the requirements may no longer be recognized.
- 4.4.4 The Board will serve in writing a notice of its decision under 4.4.1, 4.4.2 or 4.4.3, together with the final report on the qualification recognition review, on the president of the TI, with a copy of it to the social work school/department.

#### 4.5 Withdrawal of recognition and Probation Period

- 4.5.1 The Board may withdraw its recognition of a social work qualification for registration led by a programme which fails to comply with the Principles. When the withdrawal will take effect is subject to the timing of the violation from the Principles.
- 4.5.2 After the withdrawal takes effect, the Board may give a one-year's probationary period to the TI to rectify the irregularities of the programme. In any circumstances, the Board does not guarantee that the various cohorts of students of the programme being involved during the probationary period will be qualified for registration merely

based on the award of the social work qualification led by that programme.

4.5.3 The Board will serve in writing on the president of the TI a notice of withdrawal of the recognition of a social work qualification for registration, together with a copy of the final report of the qualification recognition review, with a copy of it to the social work school/department. In the notice, the TI will be informed of the details including the effective date of withdrawal, the duration of the probationary period and the cohort(s) of graduates to be affected by the withdrawal or the probationary period.

## **5 Grievance and Appeal**

5.1 The Board, the responsible Assessment Teams and the various TI concerned should try to resolve disagreements or disputes, if any, through mutual understanding and agreement.

5.2 The TI may appeal against the Board's decision on the withdrawal of recognition of a social work qualification for registration as a result of a qualification recognition review.

5.3 An appeal should be made to the Board within 28 days from the delivery date of the notice of decision served on the TI by the Board.

5.4 Upon receiving an appeal, the Board will appoint an independent Appeals Panel to review the Board's decision and the procedures in respect of the qualification recognition review.

5.5 The Appeals Panel will consist of prominent members of different professions. The members of the Appeals Panel will be independent of the Board and the Assessment Panel.

5.6 In its investigation, the Appeals Panel may hear oral submissions and/or documentary evidence provided by the TI.

5.7 The Appeals Panel may reach one of the following decisions:

(a) to uphold the Board's original decision, in which case the Appeals Panel's decision will be final; or

(b) not to uphold the Board's original decision. (*amended on 31 July 2018*)

- 5.8 In normal circumstances, a TI will be allowed to appeal only once for each qualification recognition review.

## **6 Notification on Programme Changes**

- 6.1 TIs are required to notify the Board as soon as practicable of any material changes in their social work programme(s) leading to a social work qualification(s) recognized for registration in areas including but not limited to:

- (a) teaching mode of the programme
- (b) course content and structure
- (c) mode or title of award
- (d) staff and resources
- (e) admission requirements and route to award
- (f) number of student intake
- (g) student support
- (h) off-campus programmes
- (i) outcomes of programme changes

- 6.2 Supporting documents in respect of the changes should be submitted to the Board for examination. After receiving the TI's notification on changes, the Board will consider whether any further action should be taken. The TI will be informed in writing accordingly.

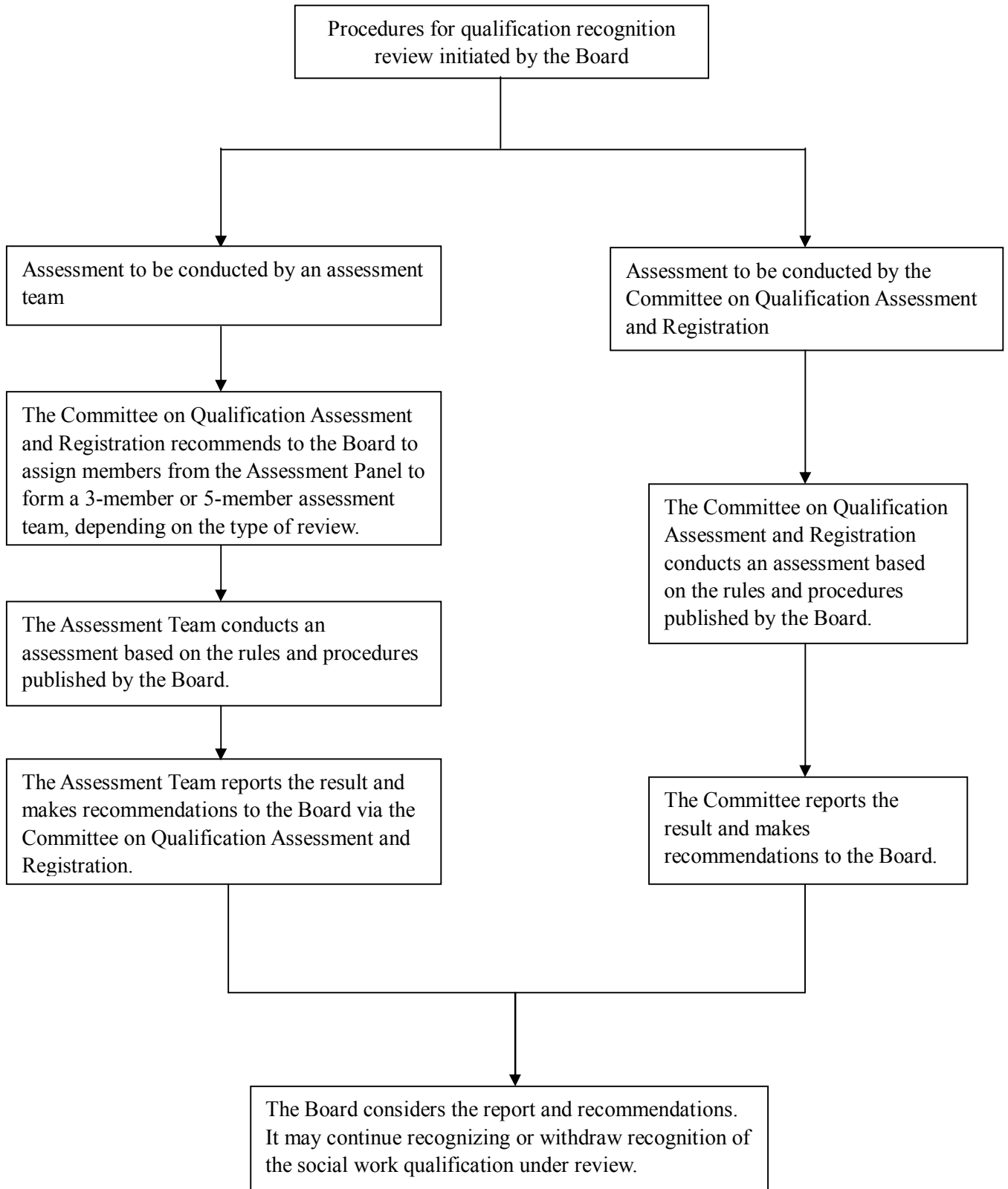
- 6.3 In any circumstances, any changes in a social work programme should not lead to any deviation of the programme from the Principles in any aspect.

- 6.4 Any delay in reporting changes may adversely affect the Board's recognition of the qualification led by the programme(s) and in turn affect the prospective registration of their graduates concerned.

## **7 Review of Mechanism for Qualification Recognition Review**

The Board may review the mechanism for qualification recognition review and amend this Manual from time to time as it considers appropriate. Nevertheless, the Board will consult TIs on major amendments to the mechanism as proposed before new measures are implemented.

**Appendix E**  
**Flow of Procedures for**  
**First Qualification Recognition Review**



**Appendix F**  
**Procedures for Regular Review on**  
**Recognition of Social Work Qualification for Registration**

